

## MARRIAGE AS APPROPRIATION: EVIDENCE FROM THE HUNGARIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITY<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** In the Hungarian Muslim community, marriage displays a complex web of relations, meanings and variables. Here, it is argued that marriage can be best interpreted as a process of appropriation. We distinguish between active appropriation, passive appropriation and disruptive appropriation. Hungarian Muslim couples tend to actively appropriate a new identity, faith and cultural models. They benefit from individualisation and localisation to take advantage of social and religious resources they dispose of. In this process, the individual comes into the foreground, using a multiplicity of symbolic resources to reduce the impact of the community on its life. Mostly, Hungarian Muslim couples succeed in their plans of happiness. Although stable, Arab Muslim couples in Hungary fall short of felicity. The pitfalls of immigration, delocalisation and traditional ethics of marriage trap them in passive appropriation. More serious is the case of Hungarian Arab couples. Here, both spouses fail to meet the needs of the other. As postmodern agents, Hungarian wives assume active roles, but with little local resources, and amid a soliloquy, they soon exhaust themselves. As for their Arab husbands, de-localised and cut off from their traditional resources, their fallacious hopes of a better life turn to desolation. Data for this study is mainly collected from the three major mosques of Budapest.

**Keywords:** marriage, Hungarian Muslims, appropriation, immigration

### Introduction

For millenaries, marriage has been a sacred social contract in which religious culture and social reproduction mutually preserved and established the legitimacy of each other. Modernity brought turmoil to this balance. It de-linked the social and the sacred, uncovering spitefully the power of gender, law, and social order in the making of marriage. As modernity prevailed in Europe and elsewhere, societies became aware of abuse, child marriages, the blackmailing aspect of the dowry,

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1 Taking into consideration the limited number of Muslim communities in Budapest and the fact that the believers know one another's story much better than in any Western city that has bigger and more numerous communities, we changed the names and some other details about our interlocutors.

arranged marriages, polygamy, and the financial burden of the marriage and the wedding ceremony. Yet, religious cultures did not abduct. They also evolved to convoy more effectively the changing social dynamics of marriage.

One key transformation of marriage in the modern age is the extension of cross-cultural marriages. This raises the question of whether religiously motivated social agents can cope with such complex social structure or not. Here, it is argued that marriage can be best interpreted as a process of appropriation. We distinguish between active appropriation, passive appropriation and disruptive appropriation. Hungarian Muslim couples we interviewed for the purpose of this study tend to actively appropriate a new identity, faith and cultural models. To a certain extent, they are supported by a culture and a community they understand and share. Arab Muslim couples passively appropriate a safe haven, negotiating social restraints and their status as migrants. In order to assure continuity, they rely on harmonious social and religious backgrounds. Hungarian-Arab couples are often entangled in a process of disruptive appropriation. They construct their new identities that accommodates them to the new situation in divergent ways. Both acts of appropriation initiated by the spouses do not respond to the expectations of each other. We maintain that the three patterns highlight the role of social identity in cross-cultural marriage.

With regard to method, we loosely draw on M. Weber's sociological notion of appropriation. Previous applications of this perspective informed research in literary studies, sociology, anthropology and Islamic studies.<sup>2</sup> We use appropriation to indicate the act in virtue of which a social agent attempts to incorporate a symbol or behaviour in her or his social or religious identity. The data comes from interviews and group participation with some 15 women and 10 men in one of the three major mosques of Budapest. The field work was carried on for over a period of two months (end of May- end of July, 2014) in Budapest.

## 1. Appropriating a new identity

Recently, Spyros A. Sofos and Roza Tsagarousianou argued that Muslims in Europe display frames of identity in close relation to agency. They consider the veil and the choice between mosques and discourses to be important frames of identity that allow self-shaping, the reconfiguration of Islam and the building of communities in Europe.<sup>3</sup> In the same vein, we understand appropriation as an agency. One affirms his or her belonging, whether social or religious, inasmuch as he or she acts freely and consciously to construct "Muslimness". Nonetheless, we disagree with Sofos and Tsagarousianou on the extent of agency. As the Hungarian Muslim context shows, post-modern agency is extremely limited.

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<sup>2</sup> For the application of appropriation in anthropology and Islamic studies which influenced our approach here, see: HAHN 2008, 191-202., KRAWIEZ – KOKOSCHKA 2013, 1-33.

<sup>3</sup> SOFOS – TSAGAROUSIANOU 2013, 136-156. They draw on William Anthony Gamson's frames theory.

We observed two obvious areas of appropriating identity that support our claim: Muslim clothing and names. Each of which will be the subject of a separate section.

### 1.1 Taking Muslim clothes

In a post-modern age, identity is necessarily composite or “hybrid”. While most Hungarian practicing believers take pride in their Hungarian cultural roots,<sup>4</sup> they also appropriate additional or supplementary identities without any feeling of shame or contradiction. Previous research has reported the thriving of religiosity in the Hungarian society.<sup>5</sup> However, Muslim clothes, a necessary requirement in normative Islam, suggest that appropriation of a supplementary identity has its limits. In particular, the Muslim veil appears to be a trap for appropriation.

The married Muslim women we talked to in Budapest typically take one kind of Muslim clothes: the veil, *hijab* in the streets or in the mosque. The veil covers the whole body except the hands and the face. We did not meet with any woman who takes the integral veil (*niqab*) neither at the mosque of Budapest nor at MIK mosque. This fact is significant. It means that Salafism is not yet sufficiently implanted in Hungary. It also means that Hungarian Muslim women carefully appropriate their “Muslim self”. Showing the face increases their chances of communication, visibility and social integration. Furthermore, that our informants do not wear the veil at work indicates the confines of their agency. Sára, one of our informants, was married to a Sudanese at the time of the events she told us about:

I worked as a nurse and I could wear the *hijab*, but in a very simple way, making the hair and the shawl tight on it. When I was told not to wear long sleeves in the summer, I asked where is the regulation for that? So, the boss said okay, and I could work, but later they offered me an administrative job where the new style was less weird. The colleagues accepted it but of course with curiosity. As for my family, they accepted the change in religion but not the *hijab*.

This statement perfectly explains the limits of post-modern hybridity. Although Islam as faith does not seem to pose a major issue to the family, the latter rejects one of its salient symbols. That is because appropriation of this symbol establishes a boundary between Sára and her family. Invisible boundaries do not disturb her parents, but the veil does. The issue of agency, then, becomes problematic. Sára faces a dilemma here: either she endorses a frame of agency in which she freely fashions her individuality (accepting the consequence of social isolation)

4 At their entrances, both the mosques of the two main Muslim communities of Budapest proudly exhibit the Hungarian flag.

5 Lavinia Stan and Diane Vancea estimate the percentage of believers in some form of religiosity to attend 85 % in Hungary. See: STAN – VANCEA 2013. 86., See also: BARNÁ 2007.

or denies herself that frame and sustains her social relations. This undermines Sofos and Tsagarousianou's thesis. One can only claim to a post-modern frame of agency and identity if, and only if, the environment as such promotes this frame.

Another informant, Kati, married to a Hungarian Muslim, faces a similar situation:

My grandparents, who though not religious, are scared by my *Muslimness* and completely refute it. At the workplace there is a dress code so I cannot wear the *hijab*.

At this point, it is clear that taking Muslim clothes is a risky move. Hungarian married Muslim women take the Muslim cloths to embrace an important identity marker of "Muslimness". Nonetheless, they have to satisfy also the requirements of social identity. Conventional codes of dress set many hurdles to their agency. The veil is indeed a matter of daily concern for these women. While interviewing our informants, we attended a meeting between a group of Hungarian Muslim women at the MIK mosque to discuss the issue of the veil. The participants reiterated two ideas: 1. Women should forgive themselves if they cannot take the Muslim clothes at work. They can work without *hijab* out of necessity because "God does not expect us to put our daily bread at stake". As a matter of fact, these ladies do not wear the *hijab* at work. 2. Women should be faithful to their character. That is, they should stay firm about their religious identity even if they cannot appropriate its visible signs. The group discussion on *hijab* confirms the notion of agency as appropriation and its confines.

A presentation by a very active member of this community, let us call her Anna, opens the discussion. She said that she chose the *hijab* issue because it is a real problem. Her case deserves attention here. In her workplace, she is not allowed to wear the *hijab*. She told us the following:

I work at a company of logistics and my bosses are not supportive saying that people would panic if they saw a veiled women. In the summer, the heat is unbearable in the workplace. In the winter, I put a baseball hat and stuff my hair under it but the boss ironically asks: "Do you feel so cold that you need this on your head?" But I cannot leave the job because my income is much needed. My husband is Tunisian. I had been already a Muslim when I met him due to a strong impression I got in Morocco 5 years ago while on holiday there. A girl of 15 wearing the *hijab* deeply impressed me. I never saw a woman of such dignified look and posture. She seemed to me beautiful and strong she had an aura of strength but also femininity. This was my first time that I started to think about Islam that can turn you in such a human being. So I started to look for converted female friends.

Anna exemplifies best the resources and the limits of appropriation. Despite the restrictions, she manages to find ways to express her agency. She would like to appropriate a Muslim identity she imagines as a model of purity, strength and femininity. It is not because Islamic law requires women to take the veil or because her Tunisian husband asks her to do so. Her justification lies elsewhere: in her own interpretation of the meaning of the veil. Anna perceives the veil as a symbol of affirmation. When she puts a baseball hat to cover her hair, she would feel, even in a symbolic way, as appropriating her own selfhood.

Another case which details further the difficulties of adopting a frame of identity as agency is that of Móni. She is married to a Yemeni immigrant whom she met on the Internet. She works at a local company and she cannot wear the veil at work. She could not wear it either when she tried to get employed by a Muslim entrepreneur. He was against it and she was disappointed that she left the job because of that. She told us "it is the worst when Muslims behave like this".

Closely related to the veil is conduct. We observed Hungarian married Muslim women in one of their social meetings and we noticed how the Muslim ethos marked our informants. Women were sitting as Arabs do on the green reed-mace carpet put on the normal carpet and ate the Hungarian chicken stew with spoon (not with their hands and bread as Arab women do) but neither with fork and knife as Hungarians do. These women put the veil and manto; their movements and gestures reveal the mark of Arab women as if the robe turns them into "someone else". One can tell who is Hungarian and who is not by appearance but their gestures reveal their desire to uniformity.

## 1.2 *Changing names*

Naming is a powerful identity marker.<sup>6</sup> It summarizes in a word the subjectivity and the legacy of an agent. With regard to appropriation, it represents an interesting *locus* of agency and counter-agency. Babies do not choose their names. It is the family that constructs the identity of their children through naming. As adults, some individuals express their unhappiness with their parents' choice and change their names while others resiliently accept their names. Religions, being important identity markers and communities, tend to consider naming as a sensitive sphere of their presence. In particular, Islam attaches a high significance to names. Although several authorities exonerate converts from changing their names, the majority of religious scholars and schools would require a Muslim name to be necessary for being a member of the Muslim community (although not a condition of conversion to Islam). As Islam becomes European, many new Muslims promote transnational names and identities.

Hungarian married Muslim women endorse two strategies of appropriation of their personal names. On the one hand, some women take Arab personal names

<sup>6</sup> Several anthropological studies explored the social significance of names in Central and Eastern Europe. For example, see: VINCZE 1978: 101-117., SALZMANN 1982: 114-128., DICKINSON 2007: 118-141.

while keeping their “Christian” ones (in Hungarian personal names are called *keresztnév*). One of our informants took the personal name of *Hasna’ nur*, which means “a beautiful woman of light”. It is both exotic and meaningful as a strategy of appropriation. She decided to take Islam and a Muslim name when she met a young Muslim colleague of hers called Hasan. First, she liked a name that contains light, *nur*, but then added *Hasna’* for gratitude to this man. *Hasna’ nur* does not know Arabic. We could not help but link her construction of a beautiful name to Anna’s constructing of a beautiful and strong veiled woman on the boat. One can notice the aesthetic appropriation of both clothes and names.

Linda, an informant from Szeged, changed her name to Majda. In fact, this is a much more subtle strategy of appropriation. Majda is an Arabic name the standard form of which is *Mājida* (a glorious woman). It can be pronounced Magda and then sounds European (Magdalena). It is a familiar appropriated “Muslim name”. Linda negotiates this change in her life so that her new frame of identity does not impede her previous frame. She believes that the two could co-exist if approached creatively.

Some names can jeopardise the integration of an individual. For instance, one of our informants’ personal name is Islam whom we met outside the mosque community. She comes from a mixed family, her father is an Iraqi immigrant, and her mother is Hungarian. As an adult she changed her name to Nóra and married a non-Muslim Hungarian dentist. Several women did not change their names. Lilla and Anna for example take pride in their personal names and do not consider changing names necessary to reflect the Muslim identity.

## 2. Appropriating the Muslim faith

The conversion of Hungarian Muslim women requires a study of its own. Suffice it here to briefly shed light on how conversion entangles with marriage. Far from being passive agents, Hungarian Muslim women negotiate commitment; they take a journey of their own towards the new faith.

### 2.1 Converting

Conversion is an act which reveals the difficulties of religions in a post-modern age: appropriating a tradition threatens the central authority of religion.<sup>7</sup> This is the case since imagination considerably matters in conversion. As Post-modern subjectivities, our informants first imagine happiness in Islam as a thought experiment and try subsequently to change their own environment, in the realm of the possible. An open global society facilitates further the imaginary of felicity. Two

<sup>7</sup> The prestigious French journal *Esprit* dedicated its issue of May 2014 to answer the question: Are the converts the future of religion? The authors highlight how conversion brings the dimension of change to religions which most traditions resist.

processes undermine further their social links: the decline of the traditional forms of religiosity, and an increased sense of alienation as a result of individualisation. As traditional structures disappeared, many individuals are unable to cope with the pressure and the tensions inherent in married life with regard to choosing the spouse and the profession, the marital problems and the raising of children. Our informants wanted to tackle all these issues as free and rational beings while making sense of them within a system of belief. For this reason, conversion might be seen as appropriation.<sup>8</sup> Unable to find ready-to-wear responses, converts reinvent their links to religion and their societies, changing both in the process.

Our fieldwork led us to distinguish between two types of conversion: religious and social conversion. Religious conversion entails changing religion mostly from nominal Christianity to Islam. As for social conversion, it is a much more complex alteration. Our informants change their social code of ethics through a creative synthesis of the social criticism of Hungarian society and selective Islamic symbolic resources. As a result, they displace the centre of their faith, reinvent a tradition and appropriate an active social role. This second type of conversion allowed our informants to take control of their marriage.

Contrary to a widely accepted assumption, Hungarian Muslim women do not convert because of their husbands. The "You must have that true religion" (as Mavis Staples sings) reason is irrelevant here. Their journey to convert starts with a disappointment with their societies and cultures. At some point, they found themselves in rupture with Hungarian social codes and unable to understand or accept their rationales. In particular, many of our informants are disappointed with the gender relations in the current Hungarian society. The appeal of Islam starts at the moment when these women imagine that Islam offers the good life they aspire to.

For example, Laura became Muslim before her relationship with an Algerian man with whom she met on the Internet. They share interest in horses. She said she wanted to have a religion but was not appealed by Christianity because, according to her, the institutions of the Church are "too human", complicated and abstract. Most of our informants agree with Laura that Christian faith (in a transcendent divinity) does not pose a problem for them, but the Church's system of thought and establishment does. Laura felt lost, as she said, and found happiness to get guidance in life through Islam.

This ambiguity of religious and social conversion lies at the heart of post-modern age. Conversion seems to offer a solution to the tension between identity and hybridity. Mária's story provides an insight into the complex web of conversion:

I am married to an Egyptian guy whom I met on the Internet. I first became friend with him and I really liked that he was calm and considerate, and when I expressed my interest in Islam the man said I did not have to become a Muslim, it must be a well-considered

<sup>8</sup> To the best of our knowledge, the only study of conversion as appropriation was published by Monique Jeudy-Ballani. See: JEUDY-BALLANI 1998. 207-227.



decision because there is no way back. So we chatted for some time then I went to visit his family. I stayed with them, then got married after a month and then returned to Hungary because my parents are elderly and my father is very sick. I liked the environment very much and I was touched by the family atmosphere. All the family members were very kind with me. I sensed that people take care of each other and are more respectful than in Hungary, and even though the streets are dark there are less incident because people are more attentive.

Mária is far from being an exception among Hungarian Muslim women. Most of our informants lack the social skills to cope with fragmentation and inconsistency. Class and the professional network, fragile as they are, do not offer them any steady point of reference in life. They got deluded in the Hungarian society, its values and its traditions. As we can see, the post-modern distrust of the group results from social insecurity as well as from the fragmentation of meaning. In front of this uncertainty, Islam emerges as a confident and affirmative religion. In their view, Islam is a faith, a social philosophy and a coherent way of life at once. Our informants represent Islam as a solution to their post-modern concerns. Not that they carried on any deep inquiry or spiritual journey as one might presume. It is an intuitive step, certainly rational, but mostly imaginary. As active post-modern agents, they reshape their social identity through adherence to a new faith and order, importing it into their lives with the purpose to fix social anomalies and give sense to their existence.

## *2.2 Negotiating commitment*

By now, the reader has understood that our informants seek commitment in Islam; the latter appears to them as an engaging and a committed religion. As our informants approach Islam, they have only a vague idea of the significance of Muslim commitment. While visiting Muslim countries, they met individuals or couples whose behaviour generates an image in which high moral commitment to marriage or family is seen through the lenses of Islam. It must be said that the only prism at our informants' disposal when they land in Muslim countries is that of Islam. Consequently, they believe that the commitment to Islam is joined at the hip with the commitment to marriage and family. They are unable to see, at first sight, the other traditional resources that create powerful – and often dividing and corrupting – bonds such as the tribe, the clan or the extended family, although these are not specific to Muslim societies. None of our informants spent more than a couple of months in Muslim countries, and do not speak Arabic. Therefore, they could not detect the deep structures of Muslim societies, being the social elements that make family life to be held together. They take Islam literally to symbolise the committed married life.



Furthermore, Hungarian Muslim women preserve a cultural trait they inherited from their previous religious background (Christianity), namely that religion is first and foremost spirituality. In practice, this trait entails a loose link or delinked commitment to religion. Contrary to Islam, Christianity leaves much room for the believer as an individual. This paradox in their religious commitment becomes more evident as they act as post-modern agents. Post-modernity brought about a change in the way individuals understand commitment. It is no longer a total and blind adherence to a faith, but a clever, selective and negotiated process.

Social commitment, the other side of the coin, requires men to be committed to marriage and family. This lies at the heart of our informants' concern. Here, we observed an interesting case of active appropriation. Due to their confidence as post-modern subjectivities, they feel entitled and capable to choose certain elements in Islam and put aside others.<sup>9</sup> While married Hungarian Muslim women loosely approach religious commitment, they take social commitment very seriously.

Let us start with three examples of how our informants approach religious commitment. At one of our meetings with our informants a group of women withdrew to a van parking on the opposite side of the road to smoke, hiding themselves both from the public and the fellow Muslims. These women are not proud of their behaviour as it clearly contradicts the Muslim orthopraxy. While smoking is not forbidden *stricto sensu*, it is highly blameable. Many Muslim authorities even forbade it. Moreover, smoking in the street for a Muslim woman counts as an offense against public morals in any Islamic country. Smoking does not fit in the ethicalscape of Muslim practice. That our informants smoke indicates that they do not fully embrace this code of ethics as a way of life.

This conclusion is corroborated by another observation we made during our interviews. A new convert middle aged lady did not know that she is not allowed to drink daytime in Ramadan. She thought Ramadan is a good diet in which she could drink through the day only cutting down on food.

Finally, our informants accept the maintenance of a marriage between a Muslim woman and a non Muslim man (only if they were married before she converted). The standard view in Islamic law is to reject such marriage.

There remains, then, the question of social commitment. As our informants negotiate commitment with their Muslim husbands, it becomes evident that what matters most for them is appropriating a marital space in which they could live happily. Anna's case is revealing here:

We chatted for some time, and I was very open to him from the first moment saying that I have a daughter from a relationship, and that I have no respect for men. I always had to take care of myself etc. I was actually quite harsh in expressing these views. During the tumultuous days of the Arab spring, when there was no Internet, he even called me with international phone card etc. The guy asked me

9 For an anthropological study of commitment in marriage, see: QUINN 1982: 775-98.

to visit him. So we met in Tunis and in a few days we got married. The man preferred to stay there in Tunis because he is the eldest son of a family with both parents passed away. I said I can't due to the uncertain situation and also, I felt that his sisters were very angry with me for robbing him of them. I returned to Hungary and then we had to wait for a visa for almost a year. He was rejected 3 times also because of the age difference between us (I am 15 years older than him). Some told me he was doing all this out of interest. But I can tell you, he spent so much money to be able to keep in touch with me and on applying for legal visas that he could buy three visas for that amount of money.

Negotiating commitment takes two to settle and the Muslim husband also makes it clear that he has expectations. Sa'd, an Egyptian, who is married to Mária told her that the decision to convert to Islam was a serious one and should be considered carefully. He told her: once you become Muslim, there is no way back. It is true that Islamic law does not allow apostasy. If one leaves Islam for another religion, he or she risks death. However, no government applies this stipulation of Islamic law. What he meant was that converting to Islam would make their commitment stronger and couple more coherent. The way back would endanger the social commitment as well.

### **3. Rules of engagement: Imagining a Muslim family**

Moved by a shiver of expectation that Islam is the perfect space for social commitment, our informants meet, engage with and marry Muslim men. Most of these women quickly realize that living in a Muslim country would not allow them to pursue happiness. Some of them establish defensive rules of engagement. That is to say, they require the future husband to come to Hungary in order to have all the facility to stay in control of their lives. Others, however, take the risk and try the Muslim life in a Muslim country. None of our informants could provide us with a positive input about their experience. Engagement turns immediately into dis-engagement. This fact could be explained by the fragility of the relationship in the first place. For what makes an engagement to be solid is that several social elements are involved in marriage (family, socio-economic conditions, long common life...). As Hungarian-Muslim couples form in a very short laps of time, often facing the opposition of and alienation from families on both sides or on one side amidst severely uncertain economic conditions in the Muslim countries, and without common links embedded in culture and tradition, the distance between engagement and dis-engagement can be blurred in a moment of despair. These are not adventures as one might presume. On the contrary, in all the stories we heard, we were convinced that these women were sincere; some of them left their jobs, families and country and went to find happiness in poor, barren and foreign

lands. They accepted to live with extended families, in small places, on basic conditions. They could not be happy because they could not appropriate a Muslim life that exists only in their imagination. Sára's story perfectly embodies the ups and downs of this (dis-) engagement:

I went to the Sudan to stay there. I liked the family life. I was introduced to my husband's friends. I was provided with 50 local money (Sudanese pounds). This sum equals almost 6.5 euros and 2000 Hungarian forints) for each week that I had to spend on household things. But whenever I bought something for myself - even an exercise book - my husband got angry saying that it is his duty to provide me with everything and they will buy me whatever I need, but if he is not nearby I have to ask first my father-in-law. Then, the husband expressed that he does not want children and I broke the engagement with him. I left the Sudan very disappointed.

Marrying a Muslim implies the appropriation of a set of new roles (Muslim wife / Muslim mother / Muslim husband...). One recalls here Anna's feeling in Tunis that her new sisters-in-law were very angry with her "for robbing her husband of his sisters". The sisters-in-law could not help but the sensation of disappropriation. From their own social standpoint, they lost their brother, a very important role in a Muslim patriarchal society in terms of economic support, loyalty and moral legitimacy. The story continues in Budapest as Anna decided she could not handle the family pressure and political turmoil in Tunis and convinced her husband to move to Hungary. She told us:

The sisters keep calling my husband many times a day. This annoys me. I told him not to talk with them in the evening when we go home. We have to keep our privacy. It is very difficult for him. He does not really like Hungary but he is patient. Here they (Muslim men) have to understand that wives do not serve the husbands like they do in the Arab countries. We work hard from morning till night. But not all men are like him.

Aside from the role of a Muslim wife, Anna has to assume the role of a Muslim mother to her daughter (11 years old) she has from a previous relationship. She lives with her and Anna is very much worried about her: how can she become and stay Muslim without being alienated from the classmates / friends or without leaving Islam? Alienation is a key-word here. Anna is aware that appropriating a foreign faith and a new role might well disappropriate her from her environment. She is willing to pay the price as a post-modern agent who cares more about her happiness than about satisfying the prospects of her society. Yet, as a Muslim mother, the situation gets more complicated. On the one side, she does not want her daughter to fall as a teenage to drugs and other threats. She is convinced that

Islam can protect her daughter from these daily threats. She wants her to obtain good results at school. That is to say, she wants her to be integrated in the system of values of the Hungarian society, and become a successful and respected person). On the other hand, she would like to reshape the identity of her daughter into a Muslim without isolating her from her age-mates. Anna's solution is to engage her daughter more in the community life of the mosque, to urge her to make friends with Muslim girls, who as second generation immigrants speak perfect Hungarian – unlike her husband.

Being a Muslim husband in Budapest is no less hard business than being a Muslim wife or mother. Mária's Egyptian husband illustrates well the difficulty one might have had he decided to assume this role. He was not enthusiastic about coming to Hungary, but came because Mária could not leave her parents alone. For a few months, he was looking for a job in the capital. Then, he got employed by a Lebanese who owns a restaurant. After three years of marriage, they have no child yet. A friend of hers, also one of our informants, told us that Mária's husband tends to be bossy over her "like Arab men do". She asserts that Arab husbands "expect the wife to serve them, but here they do not get it that way, and not all of them get used to the situation." Evidently, this general statement does not concern only Mária's case.

## 4. Cross-cultural models

As our informants accumulate the bitterness of failure to accommodate Hungarian social culture, they turn to the garb of cross-cultural resources. Beyond their own environment, they appropriate a space that nurtures better their aspirations. Still, a cross-cultural experience comes with numerous unforeseen vicissitudes.

### 4.1 *Facebook (or a journey to the land of love)*

Previously, we have seen how vivid imagination influences our informants' processes of appropriation. Here, we explore "virtual reality," another level of imagination-based agency. Virtuality, and markedly social media, allows the appropriation of the self in a new way. A set of strategies are used to reconstruct the self and communicate it to the others. To begin with, social media are, above all, a soliloquy;<sup>10</sup> an agent reflects on itself, melds it or strives to reconcile between its contradictions. This tormenting self transmutes between virtuality and reality. Second, social media take its users from the land of invisibility and loneliness to that of opportunities and links. It is a social market. Accordingly, all users attempt to convince the potential visitors of their value (for a relationship). Online social

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<sup>10</sup> See the perspicuous depiction of connectedness and soliloquy in the digital age in: MITCHELL 2013. 66-70.

networks expose the users to global narratives and cross-cultural bonds, introducing them to “the ‘Ali Baba’s cave”.

In particular, Facebook<sup>11</sup> has a considerable impact on our informants’ lives. It is a tool that introduces them to the world of Islam in a few clicks: a face-to-face encounter with Islam without risks of abrupt involvement. Islam extremely benefited from the digital age to become a virtual power (arguably in disproportion to its real power). Islam on Facebook is gentle, sympathetic, and communicative, able to engage in dialogue. Besides, Facebook establishes a bond between our informants. They created a group on Facebook called “*külföldi a párom/ mixed couples*” to share their experiences. Members of this network are mostly married to Muslim men and frequently meet at the mosque.

Two stories from our informants illustrate how Facebook took them from loneliness to marriage with a Muslim. Lilla’s story started in the following way:

A she-friend of mine was chatting on Facebook with someone but did not trust him; we made a joke and I started to talk to the guy. He was really kind and intelligent. I told my friend to continue chatting with him. In the meantime, I became Facebook friend with the guy’s brother and I really liked that he was serene and patient. I expressed to him my interest in Islam. So, we chatted for some time then I went to visit the family.

One can immediately notice that Lilla has two interests: Islam (the social significance of which we discussed in the section on conversion) and a profile of a potential husband who would be kind, intelligent and calm. These are virtual constructions and universal ones at the same time. More precisely, they are cross-cultural constructions. Lilla extrapolates a profile of a husband, from her own culture, to a different culture in which such a profile might not be the standard. Through cross-cultural projections, she appropriates a husband she could not find *in vivo*. Knowing the risks of direct cross-cultural communication, she turns to the mediation of Facebook. Anna was no different in turning to Facebook for help. When she came back from her Moroccan trip:

I started to look for converted female friends on Facebook and started chats, asking for advice etc. It was not a female page but a mixed one. Through a common friend (a Slovak girl) a friend of hers started to chat with me. It was this Tunisian man. We chatted for some time. I was very open to him from the first moment saying that I have a daughter.

Anna also keeps a blog about her story, her ideas and her meeting with her husband. Be as it may, Anna is worried that her daughter would fall to Facebook.

11 So far, the anthropology of Facebook has produced several insightful studies. For example, see: VEDWAN 2013: 87-92.

She said that boys and girls chat on Facebook outside the Qur'an class. She would like to see teachers at the mosque harder on students about Facebook, which in her view, distracts them and thus undermines their religious education.

#### 4.2 The Wedding

To a great extent, a wedding can challenge the process of agency and appropriation. As a ritual, it imposes on the married couple specific motives, semantics, customs, gifts, meals, songs and music, and non-verbal communication the symbolic function of which defines the social roles of the bride and the groom in the family and in the community. For this reason, weddings take the colour, the smell and the sound of their local cultures. That said, cross-cultural weddings have a specificity of their own.<sup>12</sup> Many communities leave on the borders of countries, cultures or regions and are able to exhibit hybrid semantics of weddings. In this perspective, we were excited to attend a wedding at the mosque to discover the kind of semantic a Hungarian Muslim marriage can display on the day of the wedding.

At the beginning, we observed the attempt of the involved agents to respect the regulations of Islam in matters of marriage. In Islamic law, four conditions should be secured: a dowry, the consent of the groom and the bride, a guardian and two witnesses. The different Muslim juridical schools agree on all of them, but one Sunni school, the Hanafi school, does not require a guardian for a mature woman. The Imam said that a symbolic dowry is enough although in the tradition it should be according to the convention and the social status of the bride. In the Muslim tradition, it is the bride who can ask only for a symbolic dowry. Certainly, the Imam adapts his discourse to the case at hand, namely that in Budapest, women, by virtue of their Hungarian culture, do not ask for a dowry.

There was a debate when one of the witnesses said that the guardian, *wali* of the bride was missing. The Imam answered that according to the Hanafi school being a mature woman, she can contract marriage by herself. Again, the Imam concedes to reality what might be a rather intricate religious matter. For, it is only possible to sanction the marriage if the bride follows the Hanafi juridical school. As the bride did not reveal her convictions, the Imam's selectiveness allowed him to cleverly bypass the dissonance.

There were ab. 8-10 men and 13-15 women who attended the wedding. The number of foreigners surpassed that of Hungarians, because the wedding took place right after the Friday common prayer, in which 30-35 men and 15-20 women were present, mostly foreigners. Among the ladies, there was one from the Sudan, another from Libya and a third from Lebanon with her little son and another from India in addition to the Iraqi Imam's wife Nada. The Imam pronounced a sermon, *khutba* about Muhammad's trip to Jerusalem and then to heaven in one night. The

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12 As attested by the literature on cross-cultural weddings. See the following studies conducted in Central and Eastern Europe: JAKUBÍKOVÁ 1980/81: 67-92., WEINHOLD 1990: 447-54., VAŽANOVÁ 2008: 21-32.



content did not match the setting and did not move the audience. After the sermon, the guests were offered a dinner. Nada and a Hungarian lady prepared the Hungarian chicken stew. One of the Hungarian Muslim women raised the issue of reading the Bible. Her stir is quite revealing; being worried about the competition of another religious book around a meal, in a wedding party, organised in a Mosque. She said to everyone "be careful with reading the Bible because it is falsified text from which references to Muhammad were consciously omitted". Other ladies joined to support her claim.

What struck us most was how this wedding links Islamic elements (*khutba*, clothes, Islamic personal law) to Hungarian cultural elements (food, humour, language of communication). Everyone seemed to sense the tension between the two sets of elements, but was willing to participate in preparing the ceremony. It can be described as a curious awareness that a ritual is just what it is, a semantic. It puts into symbols a social interest between the wife, the husband and the community. While the wife and the husband look forward to the community to legitimize their quest of happiness (and hopefully reproduction, the reason of marriage after all), the community is just happy that another Muslim couple would raise the number of the community, moreover, they were happy that both husband and wife were Hungarian converts. The community interpreted this fact as a proof that Hungary offers fertile ground for the spread of Islam.

Each of the involved agents consensually accepted the adaptation of Islamic personal law in order to make the wedding valid because it is a rite of passage toward marital life. Appropriation matters here as well. On the one hand, the couple appropriates benediction, which, put into social terms, could mean support, *laissez-faire* or even integration. On the other, the community also appropriates the couple the same way as a major enterprise incorporates a little one, bringing, thus, the promise of more children and revitalisation to its fraught body. That the family members of both the bride and the groom were absent is an extremely significant fact. As postmodern agents, the couple wished to enjoy the entire freedom in their choice of marriage. But a wedding cannot exist unless it gathers along the tradition of some community. Their links with their respective families being weak, they turned to the community they imagine to be the closest. This brings us to the limits of appropriating cross-cultural models and of agency in general. In its choice, the couple incarnates the solitude of postmodern marriage. Moreover, it was clear that the Muslim community can only flourish once it detaches itself from the Hungarian social standards and even by disrupting existing primary family ties. In the exuberance of the one, lies the sorrow of the other..



## 5. Bargaining for reality:<sup>13</sup> Between Allah and hard times

Contrary to what many guests hastily thought, securing a passage to marital life after a wedding does not end the story. Actually, it just starts it.<sup>14</sup> As a semantic, the wedding represents a web of social relations and interests that put them in a joyful event. It is a gate to the reality which tests the couple in every moment of the marital journey. As Muslims, the wife, as well as the husband, will find themselves in constant negotiation with the society in their new roles.

Ethics is one of the areas in which bargaining becomes a necessary strategy of Muslim spouses to cope with the new reality. In particular, the wife is expected to comply with the standards of conduct: should she change her behaviour with man colleagues and friends? Can she stay together in one room with a stranger, at work or elsewhere, as it is forbidden in Islam? After Kati's wedding, we asked these questions. She answered the following:

This issue is not a problem for me because at my work I have very few male colleagues. I have been working with them for three years now. Technically, they are not strangers, but I admit that from the point of view of Islamic law, they are. Besides, they are aware that I am a Muslim. So, they pay more attention to their behaviour with me *alhamdulillah* (thanks God). Anyway, I like to keep my distance from men in general and my colleagues are no exception to this rule. I do not like to stay alone with strange men, before and after Islam.

As we can notice, Kati is obliged to make concessions. As mentioned earlier, she does not wear the veil at work. She reconstructs her male colleagues as neutral or inoffensive. In other words, she appropriates the space she works in as "female-friendly". This choice is facilitated by her postmodern agency in which plurality and complexity are taken for granted. Conversely, Islamic law forbids the concessions she made and preaches sex segregation. The distinction Kati made between a technical and a religious stranger exhibits her sense of "bargaining to win".<sup>15</sup> Here, she assumes her role as a Muslim spouse but as part of her gender role and that of complex social agency. It is again her social identity which sets the limits of her Muslim identity. Her appropriation of the latter interacts with her social setting in a way that, ultimately, her femaleness defines her other roles.

At the level of the religious practice, concessions to reality seem almost inevitable. One of the major challenges modernity addresses to Islam resides in its

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<sup>13</sup> We draw on Lawrence Rosen's *Bargaining for Reality: The Construction of Social Relations in a Muslim Community*, a major anthropological study of the Moroccan city of Sefrou. ROSEN 1984.

<sup>14</sup> On marriage as a process of bargaining see: COOK 2006: 442-72., GALVIN 1997: 125-46., YIP 2004: 336-50., VAN DIJK 2004: 438-67.

<sup>15</sup> We borrow the expression to Bechelloni from her article:

Orsetta Bechelloni, "Bargaining to Win: Feminine Dealing with Outsiders in a Group of Settled 'Voyageurs'," *Romani Studies* 16 (2006): 169-90.

bureaucratisation of time. Islam's Friday noon prayer and the daily five times prayers are obligatory and should not be delayed unless a person is sick or on trip. Usually, three of these prayers (noon, afternoon and sunset prayers) fall during work time. This fact jeopardises the piety thesis; a number of sociologists and anthropologists of Islam believe piety, of which prayer is the cornerstone in Islam, to be a leading dynamic of change among women throughout the Muslim world.<sup>16</sup> We could not find any correlation between Hungarian Muslim women being free and in control of their bodies and piety. Kati puts the problem in clear terms:

The Hungarian reality makes it difficult to create a situation where women do not work (thus no way to apply the Islamic principle in virtue of which the husband alone should take care of the family). Unfortunately, my salary is essential to make a living for our family. Because of that I face major problems regarding the daily five times prayers in my work as well. I have a continuing schedule of work and I am obliged to delay the prayers and perform them together. With the exception of the Morning Prayer which I do in time before going to work, I cannot pray in the workplace. Therein, the computer tells you when you can hold 10 minute break. I cannot even wear the veil (obligatory to take for a woman while praying) because of the dressing policy. Islamic law does not really play a role in our everyday lives. So, I cannot say anything about it. I can only tell about those regulations which we can follow in our family lives.

"Bargaining to win" can sometimes turn marriage into a mere façade. Ahmad, a young Muslim male from Miskolc, got married to legalize his relationship with a Hungarian girl who remained Lutheran. They did not start to live together, but stayed in two different apartments. The marriage was to show his maturity to the members of the community. Markedly, he was living next door to his parents and could not invite his girlfriend unless he is married to her. To enjoy their relationship, he convinced her to marry him. But they had no civil marriage yet. He organised a Muslim marriage and a wedding as if it was an official engagement that grants a status to the relationship but without real commitment.

That Ahmad pushes bargaining to an extreme should not surprise us. It is true that the Quran, the primary source of normative Islam, calls marriage a solemn pact, *mithaq ghalid* (Q 4: 21), commanding its sacredness and the preservation of women's rights. Nonetheless, different forms of customary marriage which do not bear witness to this solemn pact exist in medieval and modern Muslim societies. Suffice it here to mention two examples. First, in Shi'i areas, a form of marriage called the marriage of pleasure, *nikah al-mut'a* can run from an hour on, according

16 Here, we are referring to two major studies in this regard: Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). - Bryan S. Turner and Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir, *The Sociology of Islam: Collected Essays of Bryan S. Turner* (FARNHAM, SURREY; BURLINGTON, VT: ASHGATE, 2013).

to which a husband disposes of the body of the wife.<sup>17</sup> Second, in Egypt, a Sunni country, a form of marriage called the customary marriage, *zawaj 'urfi* is popular among young men and women. It is not documented as official and consists of three contractors: the husband, the wife and two witnesses (paid for the occasion at an office). The absence of the guardian and the secrecy of the marriage protect the husband who does not assume any legal responsibilities.<sup>18</sup>

## 6. Active vs. passive vs. disruptive appropriation

In this final section, our concern is primarily argumentative. We maintain that three patterns are observable in the Hungarian Muslim marriage: Active, passive, and disruptive appropriation. We do not claim that each of these patterns excludes the other in all occurrences. Rather, entangled as they are in globalisation, we perceive them as successive appropriations;<sup>19</sup> the three modes of appropriation might co-exist in the same community or even as different stages in the life of an individual.

### 6.1 Hungarian-Hungarian couples and the increased chances for active appropriation

When both spouses are Hungarian converts to Islam, Hungarian Muslim couples tend to actively appropriate their social and religious identities. They are post-modern agents with an intuitive ability to handle complexity and bargain with reality. They also nurture links, however weak, to their different frames of identity and communities. Two couples illustrate this concept of active appropriation.

To begin with, Linda holds an MA degree in Economics. She thinks Islam to be “the religion she can believe in”. Linda has an open and strong personality, thinks clearly and accepts concessions to reality when necessary. Linda takes a Muslim name (Majda) only as a symbol that she converted to Islam. She did not change her name officially because she is committed to the Hungarian name her parents gave her. She considers the preservation of Hungarian identity an important matter for her. In her everyday communication, only Muslims call her Majda. However, she introduces herself to Muslims as both Linda and Majda. Among non-Muslims, she is only known as Linda. That her family members are scared by her “Muslimness” and completely refute it did not affect her close relationship to them. At work, she does not wear the veil and respects the professional rules of conduct. She is integrated while sustaining her subjectivity. To protect further

<sup>17</sup> DAUDPOTA 1932: 79-92., HAERI 1986: 123-154.

<sup>18</sup> SONNVELD 2012. 77-110.

<sup>19</sup> Modelled on Peter Wagner’s concept of successive modernities. See: Wagner 2010: 9-24. We also owe the application of the concept in an Islamic context to Dietrich Jung. See: JUNG – PETERSEN – SPARRE 2014. 12-15.

this individuality, she isolates herself from her Muslim community in her own city, because it is too orthodox.

Furthermore, she organized her wedding in Budapest with another Muslim community. She only came to Budapest to validate her marriage. One can observe how minimally she entertains her links with different communities. In her wedding, she recalled the community to sanction her individual choice but she does not want to be involved any longer in the community life of the Budapest mosque.

She knew her now-husband before marriage and before he became Muslim. While on travel to Turkey, a warm and exotic setting, her boyfriend accepted to become a Muslim, the last hurdle to their marriage. Her husband seemed to be a calm but firm person. It is our impression that he thinks that Islam might help him having a successful life with a girl whom he really loves. Their selective appropriation of Islamic practice attests to their strong subjectivities: they pray, fast, read the Qur'an, do not eat pork or drink alcohol.

The case of Gyöngyi and her husband shows that active appropriation benefits from the localisation of her Muslim marriage. Now, they have two children: a son (8 years old) and a daughter (2 years old). Gyöngyi met Islam and Muslims through a she-friend. This she-friend and her husband were a Hungarian Muslim couple (now divorced; active appropriation does not necessarily bring about positive output). They live a quiet rural life near Kecskemét. Gyöngyi converted to Islam and later met her husband who became a Muslim, as she told us, because of her. She was a saleslady and a passionate archer. At present, she is a housewife taking care of the kids but still practices arching.

After conversion, she waited a few years before taking the veil. Her guardian was her friend's former husband. She said that, in her village, the environment is quite welcoming "as people appreciate religious persons more". She said that her neighbours are friendly and the kids love her veil; they call her a fairy creature. Her husband is involved in a business that aims to make halal-food available in the big food-store chains in Hungary. She said that before Islam there were no rules in her life and it was just flowing in all directions. She seemed to be truly fine and happy.

Both Linda and Gyöngyi exhibit a frame of active appropriation which operates through the mechanisms of individualisation and localisation. Keeping their distances as much as possible from the Muslim communities leaves them freedom in the way they construct their religious identities. Similarly, rooting themselves in their social identities and local places familiarizes their new faith. Individualisation and localisation largely contribute to their affirmation as post-modern subjectivities in quest of happiness. In their choices, they are awake and wiry. They share full adherence to the "secular age" and its social imaginary, in which, according to Charles Taylor, no religious naïve horizon replaces another.<sup>20</sup> Agents constantly move between horizons. While Linda and Gyöngyi creatively appropriate a medieval tradition, they still embrace postmodern values, offloading

20 TAYLOR 2007. 21.

Islam from its anti-modern practices. Ultimately, they de-contextualize Islam from its historical foundations and re-contextualize it in their own postmodern spiritual yearnings.

## *6.2 Arab-Muslim couples and the increased chances for passive appropriation*

In the case of Arab-Muslim couples, the limits to agency become more salient. While they benefit from a homogenous religious identity, their status as migrants considerably wanes their social identity.<sup>21</sup> They cannot appropriate what makes the strength of active appropriation: individualisation and localisation. A Yemeni couple, Reema and her husband Muhammad, expressively exemplify passive appropriation. Before marrying Muhammad seven years ago and joining him in Hungary, Reema owned a small enterprise in Sana'a (the capital of Yemen) where she lived with her family. She never met Muhammad before. They saw each other's photos and talked on the phone. Then she contracted marriage in Sana'a with the representative of Muhammad, his brother. When finally Muhammad met his wife in Budapest, they were already married.

Arranged marriage is still widely practiced among Arab-Muslim families who live in Europe (let alone the Muslim world). Muhammad lives in Hungary for decades. His wife does the cooking in the mosque and teaches the Saturday afternoon Arabic classes for children. However, she is quite isolated. She does not speak Hungarian and her English is not very good while the women who are active in the mosque are mostly Hungarians. She is a strong character and claims financial compensation for her work, while Hungarians expect her to do it voluntarily. Some of the members of the community are not happy with Reema's framing of children in terms of religious education, accusing her of leniency. However, the bottom line of their discontent is that they perceive Reema as turning her evident advantage as native Arab and born Muslims into an additional social capital.

Amidst the gloomy misfortunes of their social setting, relying on the mosque for their subsistence while isolated from the Hungarian society, the couple cannot but severely impede active appropriation. Their traditional marriage has no roots in a European city. The only capital they can promote, Arabness and Muslimness, has, in itself, a little value for the post-modern age and for a European setting. Their life bears a look of impertinence.

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21 On the effect of migration and the phenomenon of endogamy on Muslim marriage see: LIEVENS 1999: 717-44., SHAW 2001: 315-34., CHARSLEY 2005: 85-105., TRILLA 2008: 877-902.

### 6.3 Hungarian-Arab couples and the increased chances for disruptive appropriation<sup>22</sup>

Although Hungarian-Arab couples possess further resources of localisation in the Hungarian society than do the ethnic Arab couples, their appropriation, actually, fails to perform better. The Hungarian-Arab couples are often torn between cross-cultural and local models, between individualization and traditional gender roles. That is because these social sites are hardly appropriated the same way by a Hungarian or an Arab immigrant. A specific social identity marks each of the spouses, leading the couple into two directions. Animated by noble intentions, the wives appropriate a new dislocated identity, faith and marriage. It is difficult for the Hungarian wives to set aside their subjectivities in order to meet the expectations of their husbands, who look for subversive spouses. We risk nothing in asserting that the status of immigration (of the husband) and its social and ethnic hurdles to localisation pose a serious challenge to appropriation. As a consequence, these perils beset the couple by either putting extra pressure on the wife to comply with not only the religious but also the cultural expectations of the husband, or pushing the couple to increasingly discard religion, the apparent reason they are together. In either case, both the spouses are disillusioned.

A fair number of the couples we talked to in the mosque might well be considered as examples of disruptive appropriation. In order to respect the limited space available to us here, we shall only tell the story of Sára. When her Sudanese trip failed, she returned to Hungary. After a short time, she met another Sudanese and married him in Budapest. She also had a son with him, but the man was a *bon vivant*. Unable to cope with the hard times, they divorced. She raised the kid by herself while she got in touch again with the first Sudanese boyfriend who is currently working in Egypt. They talked every day on phone, but she has no hope that the man can come to Hungary. Now, he changed his mind about the children-issue. He would like to have them with her. So, she might try it again for the second time in the Sudan.

Disruption can be explained by a set of reasons; at the outset, Hungary, downcast into a gloomy economy, does not promote policies of immigration and multiculturalism. These are necessary objective conditions for a cross-national marriage to succeed. Moreover, Muslim husbands mistakenly expect to enjoy in Hungary the same standards of living one might encounter in Western Europe. Another reason for disruption resides in the fact that Hungarian Muslim wives underestimate the social and the cultural gap between them and their husbands. Usually, disruption leads to severe limitations on agency and irreconcilable differences.

22 The following studies illustrate disruptive appropriation in different European contexts: AUGUSTIN 1991: 125-144., CRESTER 1999: 363-380., GRASSI 2006: 283-306., POLEK – SCHOON 2008: 353-370., KARKABI 2011: 79-97., WOESTHOFF 2013: 199-231.



## Conclusion

It has been shown that the concept of appropriation can help us a great deal to frame marriage among Hungarian Muslims. Hungarian Muslim couples benefit from individualisation and localisation to take advantage of social and religious resources they dispose of. In this process, the individual comes into the foreground, using a multiplicity of symbolic resources to reduce the impact of the community on its life. Mostly, Hungarian Muslim couples succeed in their plans of happiness. Although stable, Arab Muslim couples in Hungary fall short of felicity. The pitfalls of immigration, de-localisation and traditional ethics of marriage trap them in passive appropriation. More serious is the case of Hungarian Arab couples. Here, both spouses fail to meet the needs of the other. As postmodern agents, Hungarian wives assume active roles, but with little local resources, and amid a soliloquy, they soon exhaust themselves. As for their Arab husbands, de-localised and cut off from their traditional resources, their fallacious hopes of a better life turn to desolation.

The effectiveness of our argument relies on a distinction and a careful view of agency. First, we distinguished between the social identity and the religious identity of Hungarian Muslim couples. We argued that among our informants the social identity was fundamental in their appropriation of faith, commitment and cross-cultural models. This distinction led us to make another distinction between religious and social conversion. The evidence from the Hungarian Muslim community suggests that social conversion, rather than religious conversion, should be considered as the primary transformation converts go through. By social conversion we mean the way a social agent transforms its perception of the self, its social capital and its place in a society. Second, against Sofos and Tsagarousianou we maintained, in point of fact, that Muslim agency in Europe is extremely limited. Even in the case of active appropriation, we noticed how our informants conceded much of their religious identity to accommodate reality.

In this regard, we elaborated on the notion of “bargaining” to shed light on appropriation, especially active appropriation. Our informants “bargain to win”; they discard the orthopraxy of Islam when it does not fit their social setting. Pursued to an extreme extent, bargaining can make a religious marriage cover a forbidden relationship (according to Islamic law).

That being the case, religious cultures cannot but sanction, as the Imam in the mosque did, the imminent social transformation in the realm of marriage. Nonetheless, religious cultures, at least in Europe, thanks to the secular age, enlarge the pool of traits, resources and models of post-modern agency. Thus, post-modern agents solicit religious cultures to empower their social identities, to bless their marriages and to help them bring up their children. In a nutshell, religion still matters in the rites of passage; right there in the most important moments of human life.



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